



LETTERS

WRITING OUTPATIENT LETTERS TO PATIENTS

Author's reply to Reid

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I agree that writing plain English is a skill that needs to be taught and practised.^{1,2} The research done by Sara Wilcox and the team at NHS Digital into the language used on the NHS website should be replicated to inform the practice of writing to patients. A recent episode of *Word of Mouth* on BBC Radio 4 covers this.³

It is time for medical schools and postgraduate trainers and trainees to take this matter seriously. The second recommendation of Paterson inquiry is:

Patients told us that Paterson had given information about them in the letters he sent to GPs which was different from what he had said at their consultation, but they had not seen these letters at the time. Such letters are routinely sent to GPs after consultation or treatment but are not always written in a way which is easy to understand.

We recommend that it should be standard practice that consultants in both the NHS and the independent sector should write to patients, outlining their condition and treatment, in simple language, and copy this letter to the patient's GP, rather than writing to the GP and sending a copy to the patient.

From now on, not writing directly to patients should be regarded as substandard practice.

Competing interests: None declared.

- 1 Reid WJ. How good are doctors at plain English? *BMJ* 2020;368:m945.
- 2 Rayner H, Hickey M, Logan I, Mathers N, Rees P, Shah R. Writing outpatient letters to patients. *BMJ* 2020;368:m24. 10.1136/bmj.m24.
- 3 BBC Radio 4. Word of Mouth. NHS language use. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000dpkc>.

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